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text, p. 46 f.). It is described by Benjamin as the capital of a large country in which the Jews lead an independent life. The land is governed by two brothers—Salmōn and Hānān—princes of Davidic descent—“*who dispatch many questions to the exilarch—their kinsman—in Bagdad.*” Whatever exaggerations there may attach to Benjamin’s account of the Arabian Jews which is obviously founded on hearsay (cf. Adler, *ibid.* p. 48, n. 2), the main and most important fact—the existence of Jews on the Arabian peninsula many centuries after their supposed total expulsion from that country—cannot be doubted. It is characteristic of the central position of the Gaonate in Jewish life that even in its last representatives it was able to exert its influence over the distant half-mythical Jews in free Arabia and shape their professional and civil life. It shows at the same time that the Arabian Jews, however far removed from the center of Jewish learning, recognized the authority of the Talmud and were not in any way guilty of those anti-Talmudic sentiments which Grätz is prone to ascribe to their forefathers.<sup>2</sup>

### THE JEWS OF ARABIA AND THE RECHABITES

In connection with the foregoing remarks a word may be said about the designation of Arabian Jews as Rechabites, the descendants of Jonadab ben Rechab (Jerem. 35). Benjamin of Tudela, in his account of the Jews of Taimā, quoted in the preceding notice, describes them, according to the text of the current editions, as **היהודים [הנקראים] בני רכב אנשי חימא** (see ed. Grünhut, p. 64, l. 4, and variants,

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 209 ff.

comp. also p. 125 f.). R. Obadiah of Bertinoro who speaks in his first letter from Jerusalem (in 1488) of Jewish tribes in Arabia adds, without any reference to R. Benjamin and obviously quite independently of him: "It is said that they are the descendants of the Rechabites" (Neubauer, "*Where are the Ten Tribes?*" in *JQR.*, I, 196). In modern times S. L. Rappoport made this identification the basis of ingenious conjectures in a lengthy article in the *Bikkure ha-Ittim*, 1824, 50 ff. Neubauer (*ibid.*, 24), who knew the above quoted passage of Benjamin in its different readings (see later), refers to this identification as a well-known fact. "The Jews of Haibar (=Khaibar) even pretended to be the descendants of the Rechabites." The learned Rabinowitz in his Hebrew translation of Grätz, III, 117, in speaking of the Jews of Khaibar, adds **אשר אמר להם יהודים הרובים**, without the authority of the original (Grätz, V<sup>a</sup>, 105). For other applications of the same name compare Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* p. 47 and 49. Adler (*ibid.*, 49) is of the opinion that "the whole misconception" has arisen from the faulty text of one MS. and of all the printed editions which in the above quoted passage read **כיבר רכוב** instead of the correct offered by other MSS. According to Adler, the passage is to be read **היהודים הנקראים כיבר אנשי תמא** (Hebrew text, p. 46; comp. the variants note 20 and Neubauer *ibid.*, 191, n. 2). But apart from the linguistic difficulty—one expects at least **— בני כיבר**—Khaibar is described by Benjamin separately in a later passage (ed. Adler, p. 48): it is placed at a considerable distance from Taimā and sharply distinguished from it. Moreover, the use of the same designation by R. Obadiah (and other Hebrew writers,

see later) shows that the identification of the Arabian Jews with the Rechabites is more than a mere "misconception." In the following I should like to offer a different explanation which at first sight may seem complex but will appear natural to those who are acquainted with the fanciful notions entertained with regard to the distant Jewish communities during the Middle Ages.

It is known that the Jews of Arabia, like every other Jewish community with a semblance of independence, were associated with the Lost Ten Tribes (Neubauer in the above quoted article, p. 24 *et passim*). Benjamin of Tudela tells us distinctly (ed. Adler, p. 48) that the Jews of Khai-bar were held to belong to the two and a half tribes that were led captive by Shalmaneser. Now it is a fact, recognized by Epstein in his dissertation on *Eldad ha-Dani* but not sufficiently taken into account by other writers, that the wild speculations about the Ten Tribes were largely influenced by the no less wild speculations about Alexander the Great, as preserved in the innumerable versions of the Greek Alexander romance, of the so-called Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes (ed. Carl Müller, Paris 1846).<sup>3</sup> The mythical Sambation finds its parallel, if not its prototype, in the "sand river" of Pseudo-Callisthenes (Book II, chapter 30; comp. also Epstein *Eldad ha-Dani*, 13 f.). The Gymnosophists or the "naked philosophers" whom Alexander visits and admires for their ideal conduct of life and their wise answers (Pseudo-Callisthenes II 35; III 5 ff.) are identified in a Muhammedan legend<sup>4</sup>, which no doubt reflects a

<sup>3</sup> I have dealt with Pseudo-Callisthenes and its relation to the Talmudic and other oriental versions in my article "Alexanders Zug nach dem Lebensquell und die Chadhirlegende" in the *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, volume XIII.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Kazwini (died 1283) in his Cosmography, ed. Wüstenfeld, II, 18; comp. Fraenkel, *ZDMG*, XLV, 327 f.

Jewish original (comp. Epstein, *ibid.*, 15 ff.)<sup>5</sup> with the Bene Moshe (Banū Mūsa) who are placed behind the mythical “sand river” (*wādi ar-raml*) and are credited with all possible virtues. Abraham Yagel (sixteenth century) shows the same influence of the Alexander romance when he designates as the boundaries of the Ten Tribes, besides the Sambation and the Sand-sea (which he thus separates), also “the mountains of the Sun and the Moon which Alexander the Great tried to pass” (Neubauer, *l. c.*, 412). Now the climax in Alexander’s travels and adventures is his march to the Islands of the Blessed which, ultimately, prove inaccessible to him (Pseudo-Callisthenes II, 40). We cannot enter here into the fanciful speculations about the inhabitants of these islands which occupy a prominent place in the history of the Alexander legend. We will merely mention the fact that Josippon, ch. x, describes these mythical islands which are surrounded by the mountains of Darkness and cannot be reached even by the irresistible conqueror as מקום יונדב בן רכב וקצת חשבטים הדרים יחד אחר חשך הארץ עבדיו אלהים; they are called ארץ עבדיו אלהים and their inhabitants are declared to be עבדו אלהים ורעם אברהם. In other words, the Rechabites and the other tribes with them are believed to be the citizens of that inaccessible Utopia which fancy accepted as the dwelling-place of the Bene Moshe and the other lost tribes. That the connection of the Rechabites with the Blessed Islands of the Alexander romance is not a mere whim on the part of

<sup>5</sup> Kazwīni quotes the legend in the name of the famous Jewish convert *Ka'b al-Aḥbār* (died 32 Hijra). But Epstein is wrong in laying stress on this circumstance. For the reference to *Ka'b's* authority is very often a mere literary fiction. It is, however, possible that this legend of the Bene Moshe was known to Muhammed (cf. Geiger, *Was hat Muhammed aus dem Judentum aufgenommen*, p. 168).

Josippon is shown by the fact that the same conception is to be found in the Slavonian Alexander legend (see Wesselovsky, *Iz istoriyi romana i powiesti*, I, 280 ff.). The close relation of the Rechabites, who by their ascetic way of life and staunch adherence to their ancestral customs were very well qualified for this rôle, to the Bene Moshe and the other Lost Tribes is also assumed by Abraham Yagel (Neubauer, *l. c.*, 413) who refers among other things to a passage, obviously spurious, in Maimonides' letters in which the Rechabites are mentioned in connection with the Sambation and the Ten Tribes.

I may mention in conclusion that the Messianic impostor Abū ‘Isā of Isپahan (see about him this volume, p. 203), who considered himself a precursor of the Messiah and thus was expected to gather the Ten Tribes, is supposed, according to Shahrastānī (ed. Cureton, I, 168) “to have gone to the Banū Mūsa who are behind the “sand” to preach to them the word of God”. The “sand” (*raml*) is the mythical “sand river” (*Wādi ar-raml*) mentioned by Kazwīnī in connection with the Banū Mūsa and is nothing else but the Sambation. Grätz (V<sup>3</sup>, 406) translates *raml* by “*Wüste*” and identifies it with “*die grosse Salzwüste, welche sich nördlich von Isfahan erstreckt*” (!). The statement of Shahrastānī which the latter probably derived from some Jewish authority is nothing but the reflexion of the Messianic speculations of that period and it is remarkable that Grätz should have taken it so seriously (*ibid.*,

<sup>6</sup> *warā’ ar-raml*. MS. British Museum Add. 7251 reads *warā’ an-nahr ar-raml*. This is grammatically impossible. It is either *warā’ nahr ar-raml* “behind the river of sand”, or *an-nahr* is merely a variant of *ar-raml*. “Behind the river” could refer to the Sambation but might also, in Arabic parlance, indicate Transoxania. The latter would explain Maimonides' statement in his *Iggeret Tēmān*. See this volume p. 206, n. 89.

and p. 160). Curiously enough Hadassi (*Eshkol ha-Kofer*, 41c) derives Abū ‘Īsa’s interdiction of wine and meat ממאמר הנאמר על בני יונרכ בְּנֵי יְוָנָךְ. But this reference to the Rechabites which is not found in Ḳirkisānī may as well be the individual conjecture of Hadassi.

### BONFIRES ON PURIM

The custom of burning Haman in effigy was recently discussed at some length by Ginzberg, *Geonica*, II, 1 f., and Davidson, *Parody in Jewish Literature*, 21, note 33. To the data collected by these scholars I should like to add two references from Arabic sources which prove the existence of this custom among the Jews of Asia and Africa in different periods. Al-Bīrūnī of Khwārīzм (died 1048 C. E.) in his *Chronology of Ancient Nations* (text ed. Sachau, p. 280; Sachau’s translation, p. 274), in speaking of the fourteenth of Adar, says: “There is great joy over the death of Hāmān on that day. This feast is also called the *Feast of Megillā*, and further *Hāmān-Sūr*.<sup>7</sup> For on that day they make figures which they beat and then burn, imitating the burning of Hāmān. The same they practise on the fifteenth.” The famous Egyptian writer Maqrīzī (died 1442 C. E.) who, in his work on Cairo, devotes a whole chapter to “the Calendar and the Festivals of the Jews” makes the following remark in his discussion of the Purim feast (*Khiṭāṭ*, new edition, Cairo 1326 H., IV, 364, line 6 from bottom): وَرُتْمَا صُورَ بِعِصْمٍ فِي هَذَا الْيَوْمِ صُورَةً :

<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *REJ.*, XII, 266, note 2, rightly emends هامن سور into هامن سوز *Hāmān-Sūz*, which designates in Persian “Hāmān-burning.”